W. Howard Chase

The Edge of the Unused

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He was voted the 1989 Hall of Fame honoree by the Arthur W. Page Society, an association of senior public relations executives. This speech was given as the Arthur W. Page Society Hall of Fame Lecture on September 25, 1989 at the Ritz Carlton in Laguna Niguel, California.

Chase has had a long record in academia and in corporate and counsellor professions. He is the only two-time recipient of the Gold Anvil awarded annually by PRSA for lifetime achievement. He was one of the six founders of PRSA (1947), chairman of its first executive committee and president of the organization in 1956.

During a long career Chase has served as U.S. Assistant Secretary of Commerce; Deputy Administrator, Office of Defense Mobilization; and Deputy Administrator, War Food Administration. He created the public relations function at General Mills and General Foods and was assistant to the chairman and vice president for public affairs at American Can Co. A graduate of the University of Iowa (Phi Beta Kappa, cum laude) he also taught at Harvard, Drake, N.Y. Polytechnic and the University of Connecticut's Graduate School of Business. He is generally credited as the founder of the issue management movement and is chairman of the Issue Management Association.

My first meeting with Arthur Page took place in 1943 when I was the freshman guest of an illustrious group—the giants of the earth in those days—at the Cloud Club in New York. They were all there—John Hill, Tommy Ross, Pen Dudley, Carl Byoir, Harold Brayman, Earl Newsome, Claude Robinson, Paul Garrett, Bob Peare, Milton Fairman and, of course, Arthur Page.

As befits a freshman—or once did—I kept a painful silence during two hours of spirited discussion on whether or not public relations is a profession. (Yes, they were doing it then, too.)

Finally someone—I think it was John Hill—released me from my vow of silence by asking my opinion. To everyone's surprise, including my own, I heard myself say this: "It seems to me that if we concentrate on the tools, devices, and techniques of our trade, without regard for the social consequences of their use, we don't have to worry about founding a new

profession—we're all members of the oldest one."

The ceiling of the Chrysler Building's Cloud Club went from the 63rd to the 65th floor. The fact that I did not automatically become a non-person was a measure of the tolerance of these front-runners of our field.

Years passed before I fully realized the significance of this little incident. Frederick Jackson Turner's epic on the conquest of America's geographic frontiers threw light on a problem not yet solved to this day. What are the limits—if any—to our intellectual frontiers? For me, at least, the frontiers of the human mind and of this profession are the limitless edge of the unused.

On reflection, these words have become the leit motif of my career. They explain: (1), my confidence that there are no barriers to the ultimate destiny of this enlightened group if we rise above "the devices and techniques of our trade"; and (2), my own restlessness and proclivity to rock the boat of traditional practice of public relations. The tolerance of our founders persists to this day.

I am proud of what public relations can be, proud of its demonstrated talents and skills. But I have concerns. Let me list a few.

I perceive a wider and wider gap between the genuinely elite professionals, represented in this room, and the hordes of communication technicians who are the little Sir Echoes of whoever pays them.

I deplore college degrees in public relations or communications, bestowed with little or no student exposure to the classic liberal arts.

I have watched with pain and sorrow as organizations, founded to promote professional growth, take on more and more the roles of trade organizations, homogenizing their services to attract numbers, not quality.

I have a concern about men and women bearing the proud titles of public relations/public affairs who have resigned themselves to the role of advisors on, not management of, their functions. The great ones of this profession have always been active participants in policy formation and not the kite tails of decisions from which their judgment was excluded.

I reject the spell which MBA programs, emphasizing quantitative results to the exclusion of social and cultural values, seems to have inhibited the qualitative judgments we bring to management. I no longer believe that this quarter's financial results represent the real world. Strategic policy developed without participation of men and women steeped in qualitative human values is more often than not bad policy.

My final concern has to do with the time-honored and antiquated organizational nonsense typified by the words line and staff. He who runs may read. The process politely called restructuring or downsizing, which characterizes the corporate 80's, has been largely the elimination of "staff."

I simply propose that the skills and knowledge of the human condition that we represent are as much a part of line as profit management. In short, let Arthur Page be our model.

These reflections—each one of them—could be a lecture in itself. I could be the preacher preaching to the choir. I could think "big thoughts" about the past, present, and future of our profession. Instead, I'll tell a story that for me involved every aspect of public relations.

All our lifetimes are packed with history. I remember World War I. My wife does not. Our children have no memories of World War II. Now our grandchildren can't remember Korea or Vietnam. Decades pass with, in retrospect, the speed of light. There are, however, memories that do not fade.

Late in 1951, 38 years ago, I was peaceably and happily involved in Grape Nuts, Jello, and Maxwell House Coffee as the first public relations officer of General Foods. I had just returned from an eight- month leave of absence in Washington as Deputy Administrator of Office of Defense Mobilization, re-arming for the Korean War. If the restlessness already referred to, plus the opportunity I'm about to describe, had not intervened, just think, I might today have been a highly paid retiree of Philip Morris!

My boss, the wonderful Clare Francis, asked me if I would have lunch with Paul Hoffman, president of Studebaker and founder of the Committee for Economic Development or CED, Cabot Lodge, the Massachusetts Brahmin, and General Lucius Clay, —purpose unknown to me.

The purpose quickly became clear. Would I assist in the nomination campaign for General Eisenhower as Republican candidate for the presidency in 1952? Incidentally he had not yet agreed to be a candidate. If successful, so I was told, I could become Press Secretary of an Eisenhower White House.

Heady stuff! What would be my budget to manage 1952 convention arrangements? My boxcar figure was $400,000. Cabot Lodge said he could do it for $100,000 if he could keep the change. General Clay and Paul Hoffman were more realistic.

There was one problem. I was an admirer of Senator Taft, the regular organization choice. I respected him for his courage in the Nuremberg trials. He was troubled by the fact that the offenses for which the Nazi war criminals were charged were probably not legal crimes in Germany at the time of their commission. Secondly, he as a conservative Republican broke ranks with his colleagues to support some measure of federal public housing assistance to returned war veterans.

It was arranged that I should seek the advice of retired President Hoover, then living in the Waldorf Towers. This was a far cry from Grape Nuts! President Hoover's trusted secretary, Bunny Miller, arranged the appointment.

I spelled out both the offer and my dilemma as a Taft supporter, and asked his advice. There was no small talk. President Hoover expressed his personal respect for General Eisenhower, who was then conspicuously not a candidate, but said firmly that Taft was his choice and that an Eisenhower candidacy could not be successful.

I asked for reasons. "There are two," Hoover said. The first was that Eisenhower did not have the "fighting space"—his words. The Democratic research teams, he said, were compiling a "White Book" on the General's personal life, listing alleged romantic adventures from the time of Eisenhower's first lieutenancy as personal aide to General MacArthur in the Philippines, down to a rumored liaison with his wartime chauffeur. The General, Hoover said, should not endanger his place in history with public airing of peccadilloes.

The second reason, said Hoover, was that Eisenhower was too much involved with international affairs and lacked the required experience in all-important domestic matters. He did not have "political fighting space."

When I reported all this to Lucius Clay, he said that Eisenhower had every right to know Hoover's opinion before making his decision about running. Remember, Clay said, that only four years earlier, President Truman had invited Eisenhower—then not a registered Republican—to run as a Democrat to be his successor in the White House.

Obviously General Eisenhower had to be consulted. I found myself an invited guest at the Paris home provided by France for the General, then Supreme Commander of the Allied Expeditionary Forces, or SCHAEF.

For four days in December, 1951, I sat enthralled from 9 to 5 in Eisenhower's SCHAEF offices while the world's great beat a track to audiences with the world hero.

At one luncheon during that week, the Eisenhower guests were Paul Hoffman, Lucius Clay, John McCloy, and myself. Eisenhower urged Paul Hoffman to "drop this foolishness" about an Ike candidacy. Instead, he said, he was prepared to support Hoffman for President.

Then for the business at hand. Eisenhower had created a tentative plan for an EDC, or European Defense Community. In effect the plan was a logical precursor to NATO. Ike turned to McCloy, then High Commissioner for France, and to Clay, High Commissioner for Germany. What did they think?

The implied power in the room was a palpable presence. Clay, never one to avoid a quick but reasoned judgment, said simply, "I can deliver my client." McCloy agreed for France. NATO was inevitable.

On Friday, my fifth day, Eisenhower had set aside the morning for our personal discussion. It was no time to mince words. I related in detail the first of President Hoover's two points—the Democratic "White Book" about alleged deviations from the straight and narrow.

Eisenhower, tight-lipped, rose and paced the office, frequently slapping his leg with his swagger stick. I sank ever deeper into the green upholstered arm chair as the General—speaking to himself and not to me—recounted his life from boyhood in Abilene, Kansas, to the present, as though searching for evidence with which enemies could injure or destroy his reputation. This went on for two hours.

Then, abruptly, Eisenhower asked about Hoover's second reservation—that the General, magnificent in foreign affairs, lacked "political fighting space" because of non-experience on the U.S. domestic front.

Eisenhower went to his wall maps of strategic areas of the world. With his swagger stick, he revisited the logic of Admiral Mahan in pointing out the seven most strategic parts of the world, each vital to U.S. national existence. He spoke of the need for uninterrupted flow of raw materials to maintain U.S. industrial strength. He spoke of each region as present or potential markets for American exports. He warned of the perils of an ideologically tormented world, and of the enormous stake this country has in protecting itself from international fragmentation.

Stopping abruptly, the General strode to a window, took a deep breath, and marched directly to the chair where this Iowa boy held his breath.

His words are engraved in granite. "If that's what lies ahead, I'm prepared to face it. I am grateful to you." The interview and the week were over. We had walked through the mine field of issue identification and issue analysis. With no loss of respect for Senator Taft, my loyalty now belonged to Ike.

There are dozens of men and women, a few still living, who believe that they know the precise moment when Eisenhower decided to run for the Presidency. So do I.

The basic issues had been identified, analyzed, and priorities established. What remained was issue action programming. The proactive job was now to get Ike nominated. The very vocabulary of issue management I use here was not invented until two and a half decades later. The rest of this narrative will deal with the application of every conceivable public relations tool, device, and technique to advance the Eisenhower cause against formidable pro-Taft competition.

With two recruited staff aides, in early December, 1951, the first three of us to wear the official gold "I Like Ike" button in Chicago Taft-land, were dinner guests of Fred Gurley, president of the Santa Fe Railroad, at the Chicago Club. He was at that time the most prominent Chicago business leader to endorse Eisenhower. The denizens of the adjacent Club table fell into an ominous silence. Then there were whispers, and an envoy was selected to tell us off. This is what he said to Gurley, nothing less, nothing more. "Get these god-damned New York Jews out of here." Thus began the Ike campaign in Chicago.

The moment passed, just barely without violence. We stayed. The outraged Club table members stalked out. Fred Gurley's resignation was demanded, and refused. Six months later I had my staff's post-nomination celebratory dinner at the Club.

To avoid going book length, I skip now to June, one month preceding the Convention at Chicago's Live Stock Pavilion. In Cook County, where

there had been no Eisenhower Clubs, we had created 70 and equipped each headquarters with mobile telephones. Our objective was to be able to mobilize 5000 men and women at any designated rally spot within one hour.

By special arrangement we placed three TV cameras in the Pavilion rafters in order that our trouble-shooters could observe, and react to, say, an Ohio Taft delegate strong-arming an Ike delegate from Nebraska. We established downtown headquarters, without publicity, at 825 Jackson, where we monitored the rafter cameras and maintained a direct line to Cabot Lodge, floor manager, at the Pavilion. We used the downtown office for logistic crowd-mobilization and as intelligence headquarters.

We learned that in Texas and Louisiana, regular Republicans who had little more to do than attend quadrennial conventions, expenses paid, were asking and getting $1200 for pledging support to Taft.

Those with long memories may recall that, on the basis of this intelligence, we countered with the media blitz, calling national attention to the "Texas and Louisiana Steals." Our semantics and headlines were carefully designed to create massive pro-Ike indignation.

This worked so well that we learned, to our dismay, that 20,000 irate Texans had decided to hold a pro-Ike rally on Flag Hill in Dallas. The plan was to invade the pro-Taft regular Texas Republican convention at Mineral Wells a few miles west and take it apart piece by piece unless delegates switched to Ike.

The truth of the matter was that we wanted and needed the "Texas Steal" symbolism far more than a pro-Ike riot. The Texas rebels wanted a pro-Ike rabble rouser to steam them up. What we wanted was for everyone to get tired, bored, wilted, and go home angry but peaceful. I was designated hitter. As you perceive, I was the man for the job. Standing under two wind-whipped flags, one Confederate, I ranted for two hours and 30 minutes. Applause was zilch at the end, but so was the crowd. No one invaded Mineral Wells, and the "Texas Steal" did its job for Eisenhower. His supporters were denied the pleasure of inciting a riot and were nationally praised for self-restraint.

Three weeks before Eisenhower's scheduled arrival from Colorado by train, a meat trimmer member of the CIO Meat Packers Union, a veteran of the 101st Airborne invasion of Normandy Beach, came in with an idea. How about an arrival lunch for 2,000 or more Ike supporters on the Friday before the Convention, where he and his union buddies would assemble 50 paraplegic victims of that attack in wheel chairs and on cots, with another 250 walking wounded front and center of the podium where Ike would stand?

It happened. To my shame I've forgotten the name of this public relations genius.

Using our mobilized cheering section of 5,000, we met Ike arriving

from Colorado at Union Station, and escorted him to the hotel ballroom. We did not tell him of the conspiracy of veterans—and union—support that awaited him.

At this point I pay tribute to the staging showmanship of Tex and Jinx McCrary, radio personalities of the time. At the head table there stood eight thick black candles, each three feet tall. From an upper balcony came the sound of Taps, accompanied by the poignant roll of drums. A ghostly silence—such a silence as I have never known—as paraplegic veterans of the 101st approached each candle, extinguished it as a voice from nowhere intoned "Corps of Engineers, 101 killed, 395 wounded," "Communications, 80 killed, 425 wounded," and so on down each of the eight components of the Division.

Eisenhower stood like an ivory statue, bloodless fingers gripping the lectern. When the final drum roll ended, and Taps wound down, no one spoke or moved for a full minute. No one introduced Ike. Finally, he broke the silence and spoke to the wounded. "With help of God, this will not happen again." He said no more. The tension broke. From silence as in death, the ballroom became a chamber of pandemonium. The press, radio, and TV people were not immune. Their cheers, and tears, mingled with ours.

I turned to my wife with two words: "He's in."

In all the 37 years since that day, I have never again seen such a union between public policy objectives—to elect Ike—and public relations tactics—to make election possible.

Each passing day prior to the convention itself was a blurred frenzy. Trying never to lose sight of the strategic objective—the nomination of General Eisenhower—we submerged ourselves into days, weeks, and months of public relations battle tactics. The challenges were formidable. Paul Hoffman had told me to transform Taft-Town Chicago to Ike-Town.

The methods used in de-fanging Col. McCormick and his *Chicago Tribune*, in maintaining parity in convention privileges for Ike against odds, the purloining of political weapons originally intended to aid Senator Taft—these methods were not always subtle. I'll refer to Eisenhower's reaction to them at the end of these remarks. For example, Col. McCormick, ultra-conservative publisher of the *Chicago Tribune*, was violently attacking the General each day in print. As if by magic on the Saturday afternoon, a blimp anchored to a barge in the Illinois River rose 18 stories just outside the Colonel's office. On it was a tape and loud speaker with a two-mile sound range repeating endlessly "You read the *Chicago Tribune*! Ho-Ho-Ho." Michigan Avenue traffic was grid-locked for miles. After three hours, police lowered the blimp and shut off the infernal machine.

The Wrigley Building stands directly across from the Tribune Building. We rented the most powerful projector in Chicago, mounted it in an empty Wrigley Building office, and projected a four-story tall picture of Eisenhower,

using the Tribune Building as screen.

The precise chronicles are available for recall and use another day. A very wise friend has counselled me that the means to an end must not be over-emphasized at the expense of diminishing the end itself.

As in "The Education of Henry Adams," the experience of living through stirring events was molding my own public relations philosophy. Its first formalized expression appeared in my PRSA presidential speech in 1956.

The Society was then eight years old. I expressed my hope that the burgeoning organization would always recognize the intent of its founders—that PRSA would be an umbrella large enough to shield every profession dedicated to improved human relationships. By inference I hoped that the profession and its organization would always welcome new ideas, new techniques, new wisdom, and recognize that its Holy Grail was to deserve participation in public policy formation and maintenance of precious human values.

The passage of years have not diminished my idealism—if it deserves this name. To this day I regret turf battles between traditional public relations and newer evolving concepts which seek refuge under the public relations umbrella. We are a universe—not a walled city of technical communicators.

I will predict now that the next important stage in public relations service—its edge of the new unused—will be the management of values, the disciplines inherent in ethical corporate conduct.

But in 1952 I could anticipate only dimly the philosophy just expressed. At that time an environment or atmosphere had to be created that would not only tolerate but rejoice at Eisenhower's nomination. The Taft forces were militant, tough, and resourceful, and far better-heeled than we were. They held the bastions of power. We as outsiders had to dismantle them.

Mere words or charts can't describe six months of issue action programming required to achieve what we thought a noble objective—the nomination of Dwight D. Eisenhower as Republican nominee for the Presidency of the United States.

After intensive issue identification and analysis, three general strategies were available to us: to be reactive to, or even to adapt to, leadership designed by the Taft organization, would be for Ike the equivalent of hiding behind a political Maginot Line.

In concert with Paul Hoffman, Jack McCloy, and Lucius Clay—the real originators of the Ike presidential legend—we did our best to contribute the values of public relations to policy formation. We proposed to change the theater of war. We would be proactive, not reactive or adaptive. We would use every public relations tool—not just to advise—but to manage creation of an environment in which our public policy objective could be achieved.

With the nomination, our job was done. Political triumph had its costs. It ruined a number of marriages in our team. The personal cost of continuing on the Ike campaign and serving later at the White House had lost its attraction. Fortunately, the very able Jim Haggerty did a far better job than I might have done.

The final story. Nine years later, in 1961, after President Eisenhower's two terms, he invited me to his Gettysburg home to—in his words—tell him what went on in 1952 outside his 11th floor personal headquarters at the Blackstone Hotel. The appointment was set for one hour, at 10 A.M.

Two hours later, we had chicken sandwiches and a glass of milk, talking all the while. I started where I started here, with the Lodge, Clay, Hoffman invitation, the Hoover conference, our sessions at the Paris SCHAEF headquarters.

We discussed the thousand details of convention maneuvering, the rafter TV monitors, the breakdown of the convention barriers to a demonstration in his honor, paying the band and feeding the multitudes. At times he would slap his thighs and roar with laughter—at the thought of Sherman Adams singing "Danny Boy," to the Ike supporters at the Blackstone Theater, or the nerve-shattering voice from the blimp outside Col. McCormick's 18th floor office, and the idea of his picture—four stories tall—on the Chicago Tribune Tower.

At the tale's end, Ike grew pensive. "Howard," he said, "is all this necessary to elect a president?"

I was ready for that one because the question troubled me, too. It opened the door to the fifth and final stage of the issue/policy process—re-evaluation.

"Mr. President," I said, "in 1860 Abraham Lincoln ran for the presidency. The nominating convention was also in Chicago—in a pre-Billy Sunday wooden tabernacle. The floor was eight feet above the bare earth.

"Lincoln's nomination was scheduled for afternoon, after all of the delegates had adjourned for lunch. During the morning, 2,500 Lincoln supporters had smuggled themselves into the space beneath the floor—100 years before Mayor Daley adopted the tactic.

"During the lunch hour, they invaded the galleries, went into a frenzy of joy at every mention of Lincoln, and howled down the opposition. Lincoln was nominated."

Then I concluded: "Mr. President, Lincoln wasn't a bad thing for the country, was he?"

Silence for perhaps 30 seconds. Then the great military leader of World War II, the architect of peace-keeping international organizations, and the two-term President of the United States, reached out to shake my hand. He said, "Thank you, Howard."

And it was all worth while.